

22

Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality

**THE PASSIONISTS
and
THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD
according to
THE 1984 CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS**

Rev. Paolino Alonso, C. P.

Rome 1988
Passionist Generalate
Pizza SS. Giovanni e Paolo, 13

Cum permissu:
Paul M. Boyle, C.P., Sup Gen.

Fr. Paolino Alonso, C.P. delivered this paper at the Twentieth Assembly of the Italian Passionists Interprovincial Conference (CIPI) held at Rome on January 25-27, 1988.

Editor, English-language series: Dominic Papa, C.P.

Contents

Abbreviations

Background

Introduction

I. The Passionists and the Challenges of the World in the 1984 Constitutions and Regulations

A. The Challenges of the World in the 1775 Rule

B. Passionists Live among the People of God

C. The Passionist Is Keenly Aware of the Evils of His Day

D. The Passionist Is Committed to Removing the Causes of Evil

E. Some Particular Challenges

II. The Passionist's Prophetic Message as Response to the Challenges of the World

A. "Immersed in the Life and History of His Contemporaries"

B. "By the Ministry of the Word"

C. "By the Ministry of the Word of the Cross"

III. Some Obstacles to Overcome

A. Obstacles from Society

B. Difficulties within the Congregation from the Application of Principles

IV. Some Conclusions

A. Relationships: Christian Religion – the World

B. Presence of the Challenges in the History of the Congregation

C. Harmonizing the Traditional and the New

D. Importance of the Theological Method

E. The Place of the Challenges in the Constitutions

F. The Challenges in Light of the Purpose of the Congregation

G. Authentic Credibility of the Responses

H. The Response of the Prophet

Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

- R - Rule of 1775
- RC - Rule and Constitutions of 1984
- Re - General Regulations of 1984
- GS - Gaudium et Spes
- LG - Lumen Gentium
- ET - Evangelica Testificatio
- PC - Perfectae Caritatis
- L - Lettere di S. Paolo della Croce, edited by Fr. Amedeo & Fr. Cristoforo, Rome 1924, 1977), 5 vols.
- RetC - Regulae et Constitutiones Cong. SS. mae Crucis et Passionis DNIC., a critical edition of the texts edited by F. Giorgini, (Rome 1958).
- Proc - The Processes for the beatification & canonization of St. Paul of the Cross.

BACKGROUND

This work has its origin in the request CIPI made asking me to make a presentation at its Twentieth Assembly held in Rome, January 25-27, 1988. This must be kept in mind to understand what I am about to say.

On the question “The Passionists and the Challenges of the World,” I thought it well to study it in the light of the Constitutions and Regulations of 1984 (1).

Thus, it seemed best to follow an analytical-synthetic method in researching for this paper. I first read the texts in the Constitutions and Regulations, choosing all the texts which speak directly of the challenges of the world, or which make reference to it (2). Then I ordered the material for presentation.

In the introduction I have attempted to situate the theme, and in the conclusions to show the interest, usefulness and need the Congregation has on the eve of the General Chapter to know officially how far it has gone in the awareness and the responses Passionists make to the challenges of the world.

INTRODUCTION

Mutual Relations between the Passionists and the Challenges of the World

After dealing yesterday with the theme, “The Challenges of Today’s World (3), we want to continue our reflection by relating these challenges to the Congregation of the Passion or, if you wish, to Passionists, as persons.

We immediately become aware that there is a double relationship between Passionists and the challenges. Either can become an active agent that impels and challenges the other, or a subject that undergoes the action of the other.

Let me explain. The challenges can knock on the door of the Congregation, bring questions and proposals, and provoke the Passionists to ask themselves up to what point their mission is related to the challenges of the world.

In the first instance, Passionists would be rather like spectators, receivers. The initiative would come from the challenges. This would be interesting, very useful, but would never question the very core of Passionist essence.

In the second instance, the relationship between Passionists and the challenges of the world would flow from the very essence of being Passionists; it would have a profound and necessary relation with the essential part of their mission. In this case, the search for challenges would be a demand of a vocation that is determined to achieve its own identity.

The following questions, starting with the least important, might better clarify what I am trying to say:

1. What are the challenges of the world which touch Passionists the most?
2. Are Passionists able to see, understand and accept these challenges?
3. Are these challenges important, very important, really belonging to the vocation, charism and mission of the Congregation, to the essence, the identity of the Institute?
4. Are there obstacles in the life, organization, Constitutions, etc., which prevent us from seeing, understanding, accepting and responding to the challenges of the world?
5. Is the present program in the Constitutions and Regulations sufficient on the General, Provincial, Community level in responding to the challenges of the world, or must another be set up?

Complexity of the question

Let us speak of the challenges of the world. We all know – you heard it yesterday – that the challenges are so numerous that it is almost impossible to list them all, at least, to present them systematically.

On the other hand, not all challenges deserve the same attention. No doubt there are challenges that have something positive because they stimulate the human person to education, promotion and maturity. But even these can be understood as limitations and privations of personality. They manifest a lack of values and fulfillment of the person.

Unfortunately almost all these challenges attack the person in some aspect: anthropological, sociological, cultural, political or economical, as well as the Institution to which one belongs.

The challenges of the world relate, with the same strength at least, to the spiritual aspect of the human person and, therefore, to believers, to their faith and religious aspect as well. There are challenges of the world which are against religion in general and the Christian religion in particular.

There is a twofold consideration. Firstly, at the personal level. Every person, therefore every Passionist, carries with him a certain number of challenges. Preoccupied with studying and struggling against the challenges of the world toward others, we might forget the challenges that act against us and our Passionist way of life. The General Chapter may have to concern itself with the challenges of the world as agents of disintegration of the person in general and of Passionist identity in particular. We will return to this when we speak of the Constitutions.

Secondly, I wished to remain in the theological and spiritual sphere that is typically Christian. I must do so because it is the stance of the Constitutions, and not for fear of being accused of “horizontalism” or of tending toward sociological aspects. I simply do not want to weaken the proposed thesis.

It is clear that to walk in the theological area does not mean that the sociological elements of the challenges of the world are not important for Passionists; rather they are the particular concern of all Passionists, where they live and exercise their apostolic ministry.

The Challenges of the World according to the 1984 Constitutions (4)

Since it is impossible to present the entire historico-theologico-institutional process that the Congregation and its members have lived since the Founder with regard to the challenges of the world, I have chosen to present only the teaching we find in the 1984 Constitutions and Regulations. We must not forget that this teaching is the official stance of the Congregation.

The choice to study and propose the challenges of the world from the point of view of the Constitutions also has a motive of tactical and strategic methodology. To reflect on the challenges of the world without keeping the Constitutions in mind would be like mounting a precious stone without the setting. Without such an anchor, our reflections would only produce disadvantages and not lines of renewal and evolution which, in my judgement, is what should be our goal.

On the other hand, without this projection toward the future, the Constitutions run the risk of remaining anchored in the past, losing the ability to energize and transform the life of the Congregation (5).

Now, having methodically erred in presenting an historical moment of an institute without linking it to the past in particular to its origins, as if it were an island, I should at least anticipate some brief references to the Founder and to the historical process the Congregation has lived. Thus there will appear the link and the evolution of the Passionist position regarding the

challenges of the world. Since it is impossible to offer a complete study at this time, I will present the challenges of the world as they are found in the Rule and Constitutions of 1775.

Reading the Constitutions in light of the Prophetic Charism of the Congregation

There are different ways of reading the Constitutions. In my opinion, there are at least three: as “patrimony of the Congregation,” as the ecclesial and congregational institution, and as the prophetic vocation of the Passionist (6).

The first two are done with insistence, perhaps with exaggeration. “To preserve the heritage,” the past, “tradition” is something praiseworthy, obligatory. It is necessary to live and to work in and for structures. But we can exaggerate, for example, when we refer only to the past or when we ask almost everything of the structures. It is possible to value the institutional aspect, raising it to the forefront of Passionist life, even to identifying the Congregation with the structures.

In this case the person, that is the religious, does not emerge, does not stand out sufficiently. He could even go so far as to be considered simply a recipient, losing his “founding” capacity (7). If such were the case, we would surely find ourselves before a void of disastrous consequences. It is also a matter of losing the most essential part in Passionist life.

Following the teaching of Vatican II on the origin of religious life (8), the person, the religious, in our case the Passionist, occupies the primary place. Every consecrated person is so by the intervention of the Holy Spirit who has granted the charism to the religious. It could be said that one becomes a Passionist by the work of the Holy Spirit (C. 2).

The discussion could be pursued. It is rich in its content, gives rise to several avenues of reflection, sheds new light on consecrated life in times past, demands a review of the past and leads to really dynamic, renewing conclusions with a great transforming capacity within the Congregation, the Church and society. It is precisely to be “faithful to the evangelical spirit and to the heritage of the Founder” (C. 2).

I have made this introduction a bit long in order to situate what I am about to say. Among the conclusions to be drawn - I want to underline this because it is essential - there emerges, on the one hand, the prophetic content of the vocation-charism-mission of the Congregation founded by St. Paul of the Cross; and, on the other, the prophetic proclamation of the religious, of their work and activity and, as far as possible, of the communities and the whole Congregation.

The choice of this prophetic vision of the topic, “The Passionists and the Challenges of the World,” contained in the charism and mission of the Congregation is not a passing fancy. It responds to two profoundly valid reasons:

- The first is the present need in Institutes of Consecrated life to find the balance between stability, namely, the Constitutions, and creativity, dynamism, the prospective vision of the future, namely, the prophetic exercise of the charism (9).
- The second reason is found in the Constitutions themselves. At least twice we find the explicit mention (10) of Passionist prophesying: the prophetic value of preaching (C. 63) and the prophetic statement of our way of life (C. 72).

On the other hand, it is easy to realize that we cannot understand the Constitutions without a real and profound prophetic spirit (11).

Although this vocation of prophet and its fulfillment undoubtedly refer us to the Crucified Christ, they also refer us to the world. “This mission still retains all its force and authenticity” (C. 2). We have now arrived at one of the most interesting aspects for Passionists and their relationship with the challenges of the world.

We could ask what do the Constitutions say about these three aspects: the Passionist’s prophetic vocation, the content of his prophesying, and the world with its challenges as recipient of the Passionist’s prophetic proclamation.

Thus we arrive at a general conclusion: We are concerned with the challenges of the world as demands of our mission in the Church and in the world. In order not to be frustrated, we want “our communities to be a leaven of salvation in the Church and in the world”(C. 6).

Double finality: deepening and fulfillment

The Congregation’s awareness of the challenges of the world as a topic that deserves reflection today within the Congregation, and possibly a revision of the ideologico-theologico-pastoral scheme, comes from the 1982 General Chapter and the two General Synods of the Congregation.(12)

The direct finality of this presentation is, first of all, the deepening of the theme.

Furthermore, we have before us the Passionist communities: their life style, the community organization, the ability to let themselves be questioned by the challenges and to give an adequate response.

And finally, Passionist apostolic projects and programs: revision and possibly the renovation and actualization of the apostolic work in content, form and technique, recipients, etc.

I. THE PASSIONISTS AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD IN THE 1984 CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS

A. THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD IN THE 1775 RULE

Introduction

Considering the Rule of 1775 and the challenges of the world, it is important to keep in mind an observation that we might easily forget and which would prevent us from evaluating correctly what it teaches regarding the challenges of the world.

This Rule was edited in another era. The editors, beginning with St. Paul of the Cross, found themselves in an ecclesial, theological, spiritual and cultural reality much different from the present one. We cannot ask them for something similar to the teaching we find in the 1984 Constitutions.

If we offer this brief reflection, it is to have a point of reference between the Congregation's thinking in the past and present, and thus have some element in helping us to understand the evolution at work in the Institute.(13)

1. The Passionist frees himself from the challenges of the world

From a reading the Rule of 1775, it is evident that the proposed Passionist life wants the religious to attain among other goals total affective interior abandonment and the furthest removal possible from the world and therefore from its challenges:

It begins by establishing the "retreat" in solitude.(14) We all know that the solitude was also geographic. The purpose of the distance and location of the retreat was to create such a separation between the Passionist and the world that there was no possible contact with any person.

From the moment that the future Passionist knocked on the door of the Congregation, he was asked to make radical decisions concerning his social, familial and economic situation.

Before entering, he must "leave his home in order, meet all debts and fulfill all obligations."

The degree of detachment is also prescribed: "In order that no obstacle may retard him" (R. IV) (for entering the Congregation).

The finality is also preordained: he must withdraw from the noise and bustle of the world, (15) from secular affairs (R. IV).

The postulant must enter the retreat with the determination to break the external links he might have with the whole social, familial and economic situation from which he came. So far, it is the negative aspect of leaving the world.

The positive aspect shows us the goal the future Passionist must attain. The postulant is asked to "be dead to himself and to the world in order to live only to God, in God, and through God, willingly hiding his life in Jesus Christ..." (R. IV).

"The sacrifice of himself" (R. VI) includes a double death: to the world and to himself. It is a total and definitive abandoning of the world which is outside and within the person, as death lets go of temporal life.(16)

The novice continues the initiation process. He ceases to be part of the world because from now on he must only be part of Christ in eternal life (R. VI).

The divestment of "his own clothes" at the time of investing the "tunic"(R. VII) and later in the room the disposal of the under garments is a visible sign of what he will achieve interiorly (R. VII).

The master is charged with inculcating in the novices...particularly the love of their own worthlessness (R. VIII; XII). The latter have to conquer themselves and mortify their passions (R. VIII).

The removal of every element that in any way belongs to the world is one of the clearest prescriptions of the Constitutions of 1775.

The novice may never speak with a secular person, even a relative, or only when absolutely necessary (R. VIII). If he speaks with women, it will be through necessity and for a just cause (R. XV). He will not write letters without necessity (R. VIII; XII).

The novice should attain the “divestment of all inordinate affection,” because his commitment is to keep his mind occupied with God, “to gather his spirit in God” (R. VIII).

It is not possible to demand a more elevated goal if, as in this case, everything is demanded.

That is why the students will continue to do the same as the novices, led by the same principles and committed to the same practices.

The professed Passionists who go outside the retreat have norms concerning journeys, their presence in towns and cities and their behavior with lay people. With these norms they were supposed to be free from the challenges of the world, as well as from the influence of the world as such.

If there is still time after their work is finished, the religious are asked to “flee the ways of the world” and occupy themselves with works of charity (R. XXXIII). Thus the Passionist appears as someone who lives a godly life and is guided by evangelical criteria.

To be complete, we must add that the Passionist was asked to accept the challenge of the sick members of the community. Their response is full of charity which is manifested in the attention and special care for sick religious (R. XXXVII).

2. Passionist apostolic action on the challenges of the world

The authors of rules move in a Christian atmosphere, forgetting all reference to the temporal, earthly and secular.(17) Those who forget this principle, or better, this stance, lack the proper frame of mind to understand what is proposed in the Rule of 1775 as response to the challenges of the world.

Passionists living the Rule of 1775 had to have a particularly sensitive awareness of these two challenges: sin and the lack of education.

The sin that souls carry. The ministry of the Passionists sought to help people liberate themselves from sin (R. I).

The other challenge is the lack of education “in the rude and uncultured men who labor in the fields and are incapable of formal meditation” (R. XVI). “Using the greatest diligence towards the most needy” (R. XXIII).

The means proposed by the rule for the struggle against these two challenges have the same characteristics: use of the word, that is, preaching. These means are, in general, oral preaching,

sowing the seed of the divine word; and in a more specific manner, the apostolic missions, other pious exercises, confessions, etc. (R. I; III)

The goal to be achieved is the same: instruction by means of teaching (R. I; XVI). The teaching is meditation on the Passion, to teach the remembrance of the Passion. The basic scope of the Passionist apostolate is to promote... the memory of and devotion to the Passion and Death of the Divine Redeemer (R. III). Concerning the uneducated, selecting the best possible means (R. XVI).

The Passionists' ultimate aim of apostolic action is to take sin away from souls in order to set them on the road to holiness.

The Rule of 1775 is interested in the neighbor as a Christian whom Passionists are called to help, to direct his spiritual growth towards God, and set him on the road to Christian perfection; to work for the salvation of souls, for Christian piety (R. I; III).

There are references to other challenges. Passionists are particularly sensitive to anything that destroys peace, causes disorder or discord (R. XXIV).

Finally, Passionists outside the retreat do what has to be done, "fleeing the ways of the world: visits to people of high esteem; instead they must prefer to visit the sick and the prisoners" (R. XXXIII).

This presentation may seem incomplete. In reality there is nothing else. We all know that the teaching and the demands of the Rule of 1775 on the challenges of the world must be studied in the context of the Founder's thought and in the life and history of the Congregation. It is the only way to obtain a clear idea of the topic.

B. THE PASSIONISTS LIVE AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD (C. 9)

1. Dialectic between solitude and belonging to the People of God

Passionists live "in the midst of the People of God" (C. 9). In their life and especially in their activity, they cannot forget that they belong to this people, that they are part of this people, that they are destined to the evangelization of this people.

To belong means to be in communion with the others until a mutual giving is achieved, becoming thus a true inter-giving.

On the other hand, Passionists know that solitude, even today, is an essential value of their life (C. 1). It is among the principles to be kept in mind when renovating the religious house, the life and activity of the religious (Re. 6).

The General Regulations say: "our desire to be open to the people must be counterbalanced with our concern for that privacy necessary for good order and for maintaining the contemplative aspect of our Passionist life" (Re. 15). Therefore the Passionist must withdraw "to some degree from the world" (Re. 54).

At any rate, the Passionists cannot lose their belonging to this people of God. They must also feel committed to identifying with others, with all those who form the people of God. "We form a

part of human society and cannot distance ourselves from the people among whom we live” (C. 35). It is their duty “to be the leaven and the salt of the earth...preserve its own Passionist identity” (C. 35).

Thus we arrive at a first conclusion: the challenges of the world that involve and weigh on any member of this people, involve and weigh on each Passionist personally. They live this belonging, first of all in prayer, where they will make themselves the echo of a life of “solidarity with all our brothers and sisters”(18)

2. Passionist action and adaptation

The Constitutions insist that Passionists be efficacious in the midst of the People of God as the leaven of the Gospel and of the Cross of Christ. That their mission be efficacious, Passionists have the obligation to commit themselves also to action and adaptation, in a positive sense, to the People of God. The Congregation should feel deeply “the urgency of responding to the needs of the people according to the circumstances of time and place (Re. 28g).

This awareness is required from the beginning of the formation of every candidate to the Passionist life. It is required especially for the candidates who come from mission territories: “form candidates according to the essential spirit of the Congregation, always in harmony with the characteristics of the local culture” (Re. 41). It is to be included in the plan of formation:” a knowledge of and respect for the culture and customs of the local population, and fluency and readiness in speaking the language of the people”(Re. 44).

Continuing this process, the Passionists are reminded that every apostolate requires “continual adaptation to the demands that arise in one’s field of ministry” (C. 84). Finally, “Each field of our apostolate... should be marked by... adaptation to the changing needs of time and place.” (C. 76).

We are responsible for “making a mature appraisal of its apostolic activity...adapted to new circumstances of time and place” (C. 76).

For this reason, because of the Congregation’s nature as an international community, the General Chapter cannot deal with particulars, “each province is obliged to carry out (the directives and instructions of General Chapters) in harmony with its own particular culture and circumstances” (C. 128).

In general, the same is required of the Superior General. He must be “attentive to the more urgent problems of our times” and consequently “coordinate the various apostolic activities... and encourage the continual renewal not only of our activities, but also of our religious” (C142).

Among the principles that provincial authority must keep in mind in the construction and renovation of a religious house, as also in ordering the life and activity, especially the apostolate of the community and of individual religious, is that it must have at heart “the conditions of modern life” (Re. 6).

The Constitutions are clearer when they speak of the presence and apostolate of the Passionists in the so called “new nations” who have their own cultural identity. This presence and activity

“should be deeply imbued with a thorough understanding of their mentality and customs” (Re. 31).

A real sense of inculturation is proposed. It aptly states all that clarifies our presentation: “to immerse ourselves in the reality of the people, carry out our ministry with zeal and efficacy, and establish and foster the growth of the Congregation in every nation (Re. 31).

This teaching of the Constitutions and Regulations, gathered in one presentation, is clearly impressive. Passionists are obligated to a genuine incarnation in the human-social reality, without being of the world, nor possessed by the challenges of the world.

C. THE PASSIONIST IS KEENLY AWARE OF THE EVILS OF HIS DAY (C. 1)

If the challenges of the people of God are also challenges of the Passionist, the latter must commit themselves to discovering them.

Like St. Paul of the Cross, the Passionist of today “is keenly aware of the ‘evils’ of our times”.(19) This operation obliges him to a deep awareness of the evils that goes beyond the surface of external phenomenon. He is committed to entering into this mysterious reality that is evil.

Above all, Passionists must not have such a negative judgment of the world that they become pessimistic. In their evangelizing mission, they are asked to appreciate authentic human values (C. 80). Consequently, they must be formed so that they can arrive “at an ever-increasing knowledge of the currents of thought that underlie contemporary events, and should be helped to judge these in the light of the Gospel” (C. 82).

Our attention is strongly drawn to the fact that this discernment is the first task of the General Chapter: “to discern the workings of the Holy Spirit in the events of life, and thus to be a powerful force in the task of continual adaptation and renewal” (C. 127a).

Thus it follows logically that the Passionist recognizes that “the use of modern mass media of social communications... (is helpful) to an awareness of world problems that is useful for our apostolic service of others” (C. 55).

I said that it calls our attention. The text quoted here has a special force because it accentuates, subtly but surely, the exercise of the Passionists’ prophetic charism. The elements are: the intervention of the Holy Spirit, the reality to be discerned, and the actual and renewing response that offers something new.

It is now easy to understand that the Passionist cannot be happy with a simple, rational and philosophical analysis. Passionists see the abstract concept of “evils” as clad in history; but these evils have a name, very often a face, always a cause and certainly consequences.

Perhaps we are trained to see only some of these evils and to forget the others. The tradition of the Church, and also that of the Congregation, might be too heavy. All this may limit our ability to discover what should be realized when discernment is acutely practiced.

Perhaps our education which stressed fleeing the world, in order not to be of the world, prevents us from deeply knowing and radically analyzing the evils of the world.

Solitude, an essential value of Passionist life, could have the secondary effect of removing us physically, mentally, effectively and spiritually from the evils of our times.

As a consequence, we would not succeed in deepening our knowledge of the evils. Then we would no longer be able to know the challenges of the world. How could we then offer our prophetic response?

D. THE PASSIONIST IS COMMITTED TO REMOVING THE CAUSES OF EVIL

The text adds: “(Passionists) are to discern and remove the causes of human suffering” (C. 3).”

If there are “evils” in the world, there are also “causes” of these evils. The Passionists, bearers of the “power of the Cross, which is the wisdom of God” (C. 3), have committed themselves to identifying and removing these causes of evil that afflict people (C. 3). Again, the “challenges of the world” appear.

Since they engage in enlightening others, Passionists must necessarily know these causes so that the light they shed may truly radiate that clarity which allows the discovery of the causes of evil.

It seems that the Passionist cannot remain silent, if he is to be happy with preaching, proclaiming, that is, enlightening. To remove...demands much more.

The Passionist confronts the challenges of the world that crucify Christ, that continue the Passion of Christ today (C. 3) to destroy him. These challenges are the direct objects he proposes to bring to light and remove. And this is the demand of his proper identity and mission: to make memory of the Passion and to teach all people to do the same: those who cause the challenges of the world which crucify Christ and those who suffer the consequences of these challenges.

E. SOME PARTICULAR CHALLENGES

The Constitutions mention some challenges which deserve the Passionists’ full attention and commitment. For example, the de-christianized (C. 71); the division among Christians...”which damages that most holy cause, the preaching of the Gospel to every creature” (C. 74); and the missionary task of proclaiming and establishing the Kingdom of God among all peoples without ever neglecting “the complementary duty of social cooperation” (C. 75).

There are challenges that work deeply within the Church. They are listed at the beginning without a long commentary, but that does not mean that they are not true challenges or that they are not important – on the contrary.

According to the Constitutions they are “the areas of our apostolic activity” (C. 70-76). Obviously, every Passionist knows that these challenges are complex, and that they invade and infect the whole life of faith and Christian practice.

1. The challenge of sin

Because it is the source of all challenges which are in the world, the first evil is sin.

The Passionist knows that sin injures the sinner, the Church and the community (C. 60). And he does not think only of personal sin, he knows also its social dimension (C. 60).

The principle that directs the Passionist against the challenge of sin is expressed in the language of St. Paul the Apostle and St. Paul of the Cross: “Dying to sin” (C. 64).

To deepen the meaning of this teaching would take us away from our discussion. Suffice it to underline the radicality of sin concerning its origin and development, in a sense, of all the challenges of the world that have a direct or indirect relation to the Passion and Death of Christ.

It is not a matter of acting directly against sin; it is the person who is of real interest. His attitude toward sin is like a death in regard to life. There are no more relationships; there is total and definitive rupture.

The Passionist responds in various ways to this challenge. He knows that “renewing the Sacrifice of Christ and sharing His Body and Blood...He forgives our sins” (C. 42), his own and those of others. He accepts the challenge of sin at the most important moment of the day: the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus he accomplishes an action which is directly destined, among other ends, at eradicating the challenge of sin. The same is said of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (C. 56).

The Passionist cooperates in the conversion of sinners by charity, example and prayer.(20) But the Passionist’s principal response against sin is through preaching.

These points suffice. Later we will speak of the proclamation of the Word as the Passionist response to the challenges of sin.

2. The challenge of poverty Description of the challenge

Since the beginning of the Congregation, the preferences of Passionists have been for the poor and the economically and spiritually abandoned. That is why the 1984 Constitutions, assuming the principle established since the time of St. Paul of the Cross, say: “following the tradition of our Founder, we dedicate ourselves to evangelizing, especially the poor in more neglected areas”.(21)

More clearly: “in carrying out our mission we have a special preference for poorer peoples and for those in more neglected places” (Re. 32). The same principle, expressed in different words but saying the same thing, is found again in the Regulations: the Passionists “prefer to serve the poor and those who have to endure dehumanized conditions” (Re. 28d).

The Constitutions and Regulations, along with the brief and concise description of poverty that touches the human person spiritually and socially, remind Passionists of those who must be preferred in their apostolic mission.

Besides this aspect, the Constitutions speak of another type of poverty which exists “in a world where the unjust distribution of goods is a major source of division, hatred, and suffering” (C. 13).

Passionists do not simply look at poverty theoretically, but like St. Paul of the Cross they see “the name of Jesus written on the foreheads of the poor.”(22) It is Jesus himself and him crucified, who enlightens the vision of the Passionist on poverty and the poor in the world.

The prayer of the Passionist should be an echo of the life of solidarity, especially with the poor.(23) The sincere sharing of the lot of the poor is a manifestation of his identification with Christ Crucified.(24)

At the end of this process we understand that “the distinctive habit of religious of the Congregation... (is) a sign of their consecration and as a witness to poverty” (C. 102).

This description has led us to the Cross in a dual dimension: the identification of Jesus Crucified with the poor; and the awareness that the poor form part of the Memory of the Passion which is the Passionists’ specific task.

The Passionist responds to the challenges of poverty by his own evangelical poverty

Before thinking of a struggle against the challenges of poverty, Passionists must analyze their own life to see up to what point they are competent and prepared to transmit the message that removes these challenges.

The Constitutions establish at least one general principle which is truly an engaging statement: “We want our poverty to witness to the true value and purpose of these goods...and for the increase of justice and peace in the world” (C. 13). After which, they propose a project to achieve it: That the practice of poverty be sincere and authentic; that it shine in the community, the Province and the Congregation; that all forms of luxury, gain and accumulation of goods be avoided; that the religious be happy with the essentials of a simple and frugal life style (C. 168).

Going further, we arrive at the practical application. The demand of the spirit of poverty should be at the basis of the construction and renovation of a religious house, and in ordering the life and apostolic activity of the religious (Re. 6).

If he cannot do otherwise than to seek and develop his own resources in the manner adapted to the economic, social and religious conditions of the area, the Passionist must not forget that he must do so while keeping in mind the spirit and practice of Passionist poverty (Re. 109).

The community should be concerned with giving an “outstanding witness of poverty” (C. 175). This witness appears when there is “efficient use and care of all material and financial resources available. Wastefulness and irresponsible use of material goods are not only bad economy, but also totally contrary to the poverty we have vowed as religious” (C. 175).

A few ways of living poverty are proposed, for example, work. All the religious know that assiduous work is the first economic resource; but they should be aware that accepting payment for our work is a way of living poverty (C. 170).

On the other hand, Passionists try, whenever possible, to maintain a detachment from economic retribution for our ministry. Passionists must propose to live “the message of the Cross in a disinterested attitude of generous service” (C. 170).

The Passionist finds himself torn between ownership, administration, earning temporal goods, using goods and the nurturing and letting himself be led by the evangelical poverty which springs from Christ Crucified. It is true that he deeply esteems and lives poverty when he is detached interiorly and exteriorly; when in daily life he relativizes what can be understood as wealth. For him, the most marvelous and inexorable aspiration is to value the Word of the Cross absolutely, ready to communicate it freely and generously.

Passionists are committed to fight the challenges of poverty

It was not possible to order the texts in such a way that all the ideas would be under the corresponding title. That is why the two points mentioned above were put under the challenges of poverty. Here I present the texts that require of Passionists a preferential commitment to the eradication of that particular which is an evil in the eyes of God.

We begin with a response which is the communication of our own evangelical poverty. To the poor, the Passionists communicate the beatitudes (Re. 32a). They make the poor participate in that evangelical poverty that they have experienced and assume as part of their own Passionist life, and that Jesus teaches us in the proclamation of the beatitudes.

It is like a stream of water that is communicated to others. We speak of a mysterious but truly abundant fountain. By vocation, the Passionist must be this fountain which communicates the beatitudes to all those who suffer, in this case, poverty and its consequences. Thus we have the theological foundation of the principle of solidarity.

We find ourselves, therefore, before the word “solidarity” knowing well the meaning and the dynamic force of the decisions it demands.

First of all, economic solidarity is practiced in the Congregation. It has a principle and a practice. The principle is that “all the houses in our Congregation are united in the bond of mutual charity” (C. 176). The practice is that “the Superior General (or Provincial) may dispose of the goods possessed by any part of the Congregation for the assistance of some other part, as prudence, necessity, or charity may suggest” (C. 176). “The resources of the Province are in fact at the service of all” (C. 121).

Then comes the reference to those who do not belong to the Institute. The whole Congregation as such, the Provinces, the Communities and particularly “each religious must ask himself what he can do” to show “our solidarity with the poor” (C13).

To be in solidarity with poor people means to assume the challenges of poverty, or better, the challenges of the poor. This solidarity obliges the community certainly to safeguard its Passionist physiognomy and the particular character of the house, and to study the ways in which it can put its equipment at the disposal of those who need it (Re. 14). The commitment is more concrete when it establishes that Passionists give a part of what they possess to the poor (C. 13).

The Regulations do not remain solely on the economic level. They accept the challenges that come from anthropology. In the struggle against poverty, Passionists must become able to promote “the integral development of those persons whose conditions, hopes and circumstances manifest their poverty” (Re. 32c).

There is nothing else in the Constitutions and Regulations. The prophetic charism will make us find and practice other more radical and authentic means, which will succeed in destroying the challenges of poverty so that every Passionist may become brother to the poor, even in the external reality of life as the beatitudes seem to demand, and see Christ Crucified in the poor.

3. The Challenges of Selfishness and of Power(25)

In the light of the life of Christ, “Who came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (26) and who, on the cross, “tore down the wall of separation and made all one people” (27), the Passionist commits himself to spending his life in the service of the Gospel and of people, whom he endeavors to love in Christ (C. 18).

The message and the resolve of the Passionists are clear: death to selfishness (C. 64). Reference to the cross could not be lacking. The text expresses a very particular light: “The proclamation of Christ, exalted on the Cross and drawing all people to Himself, is a most powerful means of freeing us all from selfishness, and of bringing together into one heart and one mind the People of God whom we serve” (R. 34).

Passionists overcome these challenges of selfishness and power above all in themselves and cast them out from their evangelical communities, endeavoring to live the fullness of christian charity, uniting themselves in mind and heart with each other (28), treating one another as brothers in Christ, and being concerned about each other.(29)

The text on obedience clearly states that “living together, in a spirit of cooperation and peaceful harmony (30), we aim at overcoming in ourselves and in our world every form of self-seeking and every abuse of power. In this way is clearly revealed the power of the Cross to set people free” (C. 22). We also respect the dignity and equality of all, accepting each person in his uniqueness and helping each one to develop his own personality and his own talents (C. 26).

According to the Constitutions, “all the members of the Congregation have the same rights and obligations” (C. 101). The Constitutions go further. The Passionists regard priests and brothers as equals. And this for two reasons: because they “share the same Passionist vocation, and are called to live in community as equal sons of the same Father” (C. 100).

Referring to the local community, the Constitutions state: “The local Community is the living cell on which depends the vitality of the entire Congregation. Here each Passionist lives in a group united in brotherhood, each aware of his human dignity as a son of God, and each ready to respond to the lawful demands of co-responsibility. Each individual member has the right and duty to take part in all the steps involved in making decisions; his role should never be one of merely passive acquiescence” (C. 119).

Another principle is that of subsidiarity which the Constitutions apply to the local community, as enjoying freedom “to develop its life and mission in its own area” (C. 121). “The superior must

guide and direct his brethren with genuine respect for their human personality, so that each may feel he is regarded with kindly consideration”(C. 120).

The superior “...is one with his brethren... He therefore exercises his authority in a spirit of service for the brethren and manifests thereby the charity with which God loves them.”(31)

This, certainly, is the response to the challenge of selfishness and manipulation of the neighbor for one’s own interests and the exercise of power and authority for a purpose other than the service and manifestation of fraternal love.

4. The challenge arising from the lack of a profound sense of human love and community life

“Following the example of Christ and for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, (Passionists) choose celibacy with full freedom”(32); among other ends, they desire to show the profound meaning of human love and its ultimate purpose, “that God may be all in all... That all may be one.”(33)

Thus appears the response to two challenges of the world: the lack of the true sense of human love and the lack of authentic community life. There is no need to dwell on the problems, the deviation, the disorientation and abjection which these two challenges cause. The Word of the Cross is the testimony of the specific personal and community life which should be the response to these two challenges.

The accentuation and the recognition of the dignity and nobility of human love, on the one hand, and the urgent need in society and in the Church for models of fraternal community according to the Gospel, on the other, impel Passionists to live in conformity with their obligation of offering a kind of comportment which appears authentic to the one who sees it. Thus, like Christ, they should become true brothers to all (C. 20).

5. Suffering, injustice, lack of a deep respect for human life, hunger for peace, truth and life (C. 65)

An objection

In the title above there are a number of challenges we find enumerated in the Constitutions.

First of all, the actual Passion and Death of Christ in the “crucified of today” includes the complexity of all the challenges of the world which have a real relationship with Christ Crucified.

Every “crucified” of today teaches us what the challenges are and the effects they produce in the human person. It is sufficient to apply the principles we cite in other places, and to utilize the methodology suggested there to succeed in identifying this Passion and Death of Christ, and to understand the challenges of today involving Passionists.

One who meets these challenges with generosity of spirit will doubtlessly experience their magnitude, their profundity and fullness.

Humanity discovering these challenges as real wounds is dismayed because it cannot find the solution. The Passionist should be found in the heart of these challenges with the power of the cross as the most efficacious remedy, according to the words of our Holy Father (C. 1).

Passionist response

It would be incorrect to proceed immediately to the responses the Constitutions offer without first setting in relief what is expected within the Congregation regarding one of the groups mentioned above: the suffering. With community solicitude, the Passionists regard it as very important to take care of the “infirm” who participate most intensely in the Passion of Christ (34) and also of the aged.(35)

The Constitutions and Regulations propose a real program of action to conquer these challenges:

1. Impelled by his vocation, the Passionist continues to make efforts until the challenge has been overcome.
2. His prayer must become an echo of a life of solidarity...with the afflicted.(36)
3. The Passionist has the obligation of becoming thoroughly versed in the knowledge of the Passion of Christ both in history and in the lives of people today, for the Passion of Christ and the sufferings of his Mystical Body form one mystery of salvation (C. 65).
4. The Passionist’s proper mission includes “communicating the Beatitudes to the afflicted, the poor, and all the suffering of this world (Re. 32a).
5. His service extends even to participating as much as possible in the “joys, sufferings and anxieties” of people (C. 18).
6. “As far as possible, we intend to share our life with others, to use our possessions for the relief of suffering and for the increase of justice and peace in the world.”(37)
7. Passionists must “strive to make our lives and apostolate an authentic and credible witness on behalf of justice and human dignity” (C.72). The Constitutions are still more explicit regarding our own life: “Our life-style must stand out as a prophetic condemnation of the injustices among which we live; it should be a continual witness against the abuses of a consumer society” (C. 72).

With this program the Passionist will help discover the meaning of liberation which brings Christ Crucified into this society so needful “of being rescued from alienation, from ambitions and from injustice” (Re. 32b). He will also be able to lead the faithful to meditate and to experience profoundly this mystery which is the Passion, “and so bring them to a closer union with God, a greater knowledge of themselves, and a more sensitive response to the needs of their neighbors (C. 65).

Conclusion

The Passionist's responses, guided by the teaching of the Church and urged by his consecration to the Passion of Christ (C. 72), are oriented in two lines, each differing somewhat from the other.

One response is limited to preaching, to teaching. It is further limited to an identification which is intellectual, affective, also at the faith level. It is, one can say, a commitment of the teacher, of the apostle. It seems not to be involved existentially, as directed in some points of the Constitutions.

The other line proposes that everyone should be committed to these challenges: the individual religious, the communities, the Provinces, the Congregation, that is to say, the various units existing in the Congregation (C. 13).

We won't go into particulars here, for it is impossible to fix the manner, the modes, keeping in mind the diversity and the universality-catholicity of the Congregation. But the obligation is there. Each one has to ask himself and decide, recalling his prophetic vocation as a Passionist, how he must go about putting into effect his responses.

II. THE PASSIONIST'S PROPHETIC MESSAGE AS RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD

A. "IMMERSED IN THE LIFE AND HISTORY OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES" (C. 63)

1. Our identification with the Passion of Christ

For St. Paul of the Cross, the most efficacious remedy for the evils of his time was, and still is for us today, the Passion of Christ, "the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love".(38)

Here we have a privileged possibility of Passionist action and charismatic-prophetic ministry. Let us go a little deeper. There is the "evil"; there are the "evils." There is also the remedy. The most efficacious is the Passion of Christ, the love of Christ lived and manifested on the Cross. It is for the Passionist to apply this remedy to the evils, to the challenges of the world.

We know sufficiently well the Passion as described in the Gospels. It is the "personal" Passion of Jesus to which we address our consideration and our faith. By means of study, meditation and contemplation we desire to enter into this mystery of love and of sorrow (39); also by means of personal experience: mortification, suffering, purification, etc., we endeavor to comprehend the Passion in our identification with Christ Crucified.

2. Our identification with the Passion of Christ which is continuing in this world

In my opinion this identification should be developed in our endeavor to understand it through the awareness, the meditation and the experience of the Passion of Christ which "continues in this world until He comes in glory" (C. 3).

It is in this way that we arrive “at the challenges of the world.” Many of these challenges, unfortunately too many and in a certain manner all of them, bring about the Passion and Death of Christ, especially in our day.

One might think that they accidentally touch the Passionist. I am of a different opinion. If the Passionist becomes such by his identification with the Passion of Christ, and this Passion is found today in the world, the Passionist cannot content himself with only the identification with the personal Passion which the Evangelists recount. He has also the obligation of identifying himself with the actual Passion of Christ.

3. Keeping the memory, “involved with the events of the world”

Following the teaching of the Constitutions, the Passionist participates also in the Paschal Mystery “through the daily events in which our lives and work involve us” (C. 39).

From this point of view, the challenges of the world, at least some of them, become an existential argument that the Passionist cannot do less than know, assume and identify himself through experience and through his offering the response of the Passion of Christ for the purpose of overcoming these challenges, even to the insertion of the Resurrection, the Kingdom of God. This process of identification and remembering the Passion of Christ is not only valid but also necessary for the Passionist.

As Christ has loved and has prayed for all (40) and sacrificed himself for all (41), the Passionist is committed to universal charity... sharing in different measure the life, intentions and problems (42) of mankind.

The thought is repeated a number of times in the Constitutions. Citing *Gaudium et Spes*, it affirms that we “share in varying degrees in the life, aims, and problems of these other groups” in their journey toward the Father (43). Perhaps the following text is even more meaningful: “We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow” (C. 3).

The Passionist bears within himself the strength to carry out this program: “The more we love others in Christ, the more sensitive we become to their joys, sorrows, and anxieties” (C. 18), becoming brothers to all, like Christ who “freely accepted the role of servant” (C. 20).

The Passionist knows that by renewing the sacrifice of Christ and participating in his Body and Blood, he announces the death of the Lord and proclaims his resurrection. In doing so, he not only prays for the necessities of all others...but feels obligated to unite to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ his personal sacrifice and that of all people (C. 42).

Immersed “in the joys and sorrows of those with whom he lived” (C. 63), Christ is proposed to the Passionist as the typical model of an incarnation and assumption of the life and history of peoples: the ideal and positive position in regard to the challenges of the world.

This helps to understand better why the Constitutions teach that Passionists “by our preaching and by our caring concern for those among whom we live, become doers of the word’ and true witnesses to the Word of God” (C. 63).

These texts, nevertheless, can be read and interpreted according to the spiritual and theological situation in which each one finds himself.

For the present I would like to mention that in the Constitutions of 1984 there is a new manner of speaking in comparison with the editions of the previous Rules and Constitutions. As a consequence, one cannot follow these newer texts by reading and interpreting them on the sole basis of the spiritual and theological pattern of the past.

This appears evident in the new christological concept of the Passion, enriched in a manner which makes it necessary to change the traditional theology of the Passion, at least in the dimension that it is partial and therefore insufficient.

Here we are again before the challenges of the world with the obligation of finding and giving a response as Passionists and precisely to become Passionists.

B. “BY THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD”(C. 63)

Once we have become aware of how Passionists must approach the challenges of the world, we try to understand the responses they can give. In the first place they give their responses through the ministry of the word.

1. The proclamation of the Word

It is fundamental to our purpose to comprehend in depth the importance and the key position which the proclamation of the word occupies in the carrying out of the ministry of Passionists. Every Passionist, the entire Congregation, holds “the ministry of the word in highest esteem... Christ, Himself, is the Word of truth, the ‘Word of Life’(44): word proclaimed by means of preaching (C. 63). In the Constitutions, this is an indisputable axiomatic principle. In speaking of the other apostolic activities, therefore, this is evidently to be taken for granted.

This truth is strengthened in the Constitutions by its connection with the origins of the Congregation: “In conformity with the tradition of the Founder, we must dedicate ourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God for the benefit of the people” (Re. 33). The basis for this is already established in the first words of the Constitutions: “St. Paul of the Cross gathered companions to live together and to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all” (C. 1).

Various consequences follow from this principle. The first regarding formation: “Candidates for the ministerial priesthood are to be educated as pastors, apostles and mediators of the Word and of the Sacraments in the service of the People of God” (Re. 54).

Further on it is more precisely specified: “Each Province must make suitable practical arrangements so that religious in formation may be led step by step into apostolic work, especially the ministry of the Word” (Re. 56).

Secondly, regarding the choice of ministries. The list of apostolic activities carried out by Passionists clearly proves that the ministry of the Word is of primary importance and there are several fields specified for this one activity.

In n. 33 of the Regulations there is the first enumeration: “Following the tradition of our Founder, we devote ourselves to proclaiming the Word of God... through parish missions, spiritual exercises, renewal courses, and our overseas missions” (Re. 33). The Constitutions establish with all solemnity that “the preaching of parish missions and of spiritual exercises remains our special and central activity” (C. 70).

This list is completed further on: To achieve “our primary object of bringing to all people the saving Word of the Cross, we avail ourselves of all effective forms of apostolic effort, such as the use of mass media, the establishment of specialized Passionist communities, and the setting up of centers especially concerned with apostolic initiatives.” (Re. 36). Passionists, therefore, must “give a special place to the ministry of the Word” (Re. 28c).

On this point it is not difficult to draw a clear and precise conclusion: the proclamation of the Word by means of preaching is the principal and proper activity of the Passionists.

Also in the second list of activities, the proclamation of the Word is basic. Perhaps in developing this activity it would be possible that Passionists, moved by the prophetic dynamism proper to the Institute, might succeed in proclaiming the vivifying Word of the Cross in new ways, as yet not introduced in the entire Congregation, new forms which can also respond “with power” to the challenges of this world (C. 3).

2. In search of new forms of proclaiming the Word

Together with what I mentioned a short time ago, I see a principle of actualizing the ministry of the word, and, in its turn, a thrust toward the search for adequate responses to the challenges of the world, in the text of n. 62 of the Constitutions, referring to the apostolic community: “We have inherited from our Founder the precious legacy of his teachings and personal example. This is a source of inspiration to the entire Congregation, and challenges each member to play his part zealously in the apostolic endeavors demanded by our times.”

This principle, criterion, illumines the search for responses the Passionists must give to the challenges of the world. It contains three points:

- Firstly, the example and the teachings of the Founder inspiring the Congregation. St. Paul of the Cross implanted the Institute in the world of his day and in the situation in which the Church was living at that time. There are profound differences between the time of the Founder and our own time, 1988. It is the task of the Congregation to clarify these differences.
- Secondly, the involvement of all the religious to participate with great dedication. We must insist that the participation of all the religious is required. This is, therefore, a Congregational search. All the religious have a word to say.
- Finally, in the “apostolic activities demanded by our times.” The phrase “demanded by our times” adds a new creative commitment in regard to the sense of “conservation” indicated in the first point.

Thus there is space given to the possibility of new activities; rather, these activities should be obligatory if they are required by our times. The same thing, more or less, will be said in another place: “in whatever way best accords with his gifts and circumstances” (C. 63).

Once again we close on the note of the dialectic: “the Passionists and the challenges of the world.” It’s a dialectic which certainly demands discernment, but also responses which cannot be precisely those we have given until now.

C. “BY THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD OF THE CROSS”(C. 3)

Actually Passionists do not dedicate themselves with ultimate finality to the proclamation of the Word, above all if the preaching is understood in its current meaning. It belongs to the Passionist to carry out the ministry of the Word of the Cross. Let us look at the teachings which are found in the Constitutions and the Regulations on this topic.

1. The Passionist’s apostolic mission

In the first place, as Passionists we desire that our earthly pilgrimage be a proclamation of hope for all people (C. 8).

Passionists commit themselves to make known “God’s love for all people,” and show “the path they must follow as they make their way towards the Father”(C. 5). They know by experience that by doing the will of God they become “witnesses to the dynamic presence of Christ and of his love for the Father”(45).

Until now, nothing special has been said which does not also refer to every Christian who carries out his ministry. But the Constitutions proceed in their teaching to the point of making us discover the uniqueness of Passionist ministry. It seems to me that this can be the process which will lead us to the precise indication of the Passionist mission.

As a fundamental activity the Passionist meditates frequently on Christ Crucified, the better to conform himself to Christ’s death and resurrection and to be ready to proclaim to others that which he himself has experienced(46).

Contemplating the life and mission of Christ, one becomes more capable of manifesting His love and of helping others make of their lives an offering “in Christ to the Father” (C. 5). That is: to help everyone know Christ... “and share His sufferings and, becoming like Him in His death, (so that he) may be united with Him in glory” (C. 3).

For this reason he is dedicated “to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ. By word and deed we strive to foster awareness of its meaning and value for each person and for the life of the world” (C. 6); or, as it is expressed in the chapter on the apostolic community, “to keep constantly alive in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion... To render more and more fruitful that redemptive love”(47).

To achieve it, he teaches the faithful to meditate assiduously on the Passion, regarded by him as the most efficacious means for the conversion and the sanctification of all (48).

In conclusion, Passionists are called to “preach the word of the Cross,”(49) to “evangelize others by means of the Word of the Cross” (C. 3), and “to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate”(50).

2. Finality of this mission

We have reached the conclusion that the goal of the mission of the Passionists is the announcing, the proclamation, the communication of the Word of the Cross to the world. Passionists intend that the faithful will keep alive the memory of the Passion. Passionists appropriate charismatically to themselves the words of St. Paul the Apostle: “We preach Christ Crucified... and Risen.”(51); and they accept “the crucial place in His life of the Mystery of the Passion” (C. 64).

And all this because the Passion of Jesus “is the greatest and most stupendous work of divine love” (L. II, 499); and “the most effective remedy” (C. 1). It reveals the power of God which pervades the world. “His Passion reveals the power of God which penetrates the world, destroying the power of evil and building up the Kingdom of God” (C. 5).” Evil is presented as a power filled with strength and of very great capacity, determined to establish its kingdom in this world.

Opposed to it is the Kingdom of God. Jesus has come to build it up. The supreme action, the definitive battle has been the moment of his Passion. Jesus, accepting the evil and struggling against it, had to arrive at the Passion and Death on the Cross.

No challenge in particular is mentioned because all are included from the moment that the evil which is found everywhere is pointed out.

This is the process the Passionist must live in its most radical depths. Instructed by the teaching and the experience of our Founder, the Passionist is faithful to his consecration to the Passion of Christ and carries out his mission: to participate in this Passion and to promote its memory.(52)

3. Strength and validity of this mission(C. 2)

It is logical that in the choice of apostolic activities for our ministry, all (provinces, communities and individual religious) keep in mind the criterion: that we always have before us the vow of promoting the memory of the Passion of Jesus Christ.(53)

Passionists accept and make their own the specific mission of the Institute. It is a mission replete with strength and validity, also for our day (C. 5).

The task of every Passionist is to demonstrate that the Passion of Christ is valid, it is the power of God and is valid for this time. One thing is certain: the “Word of the Cross” has a great prophetic value (C. 63). The Passionist carries this prophetic value in his life and in his apostolic ministry.

Enriched by this prophetic ministry, it is no wonder that among the criteria which regulate his apostolic life he remembers “we must never lose sight of our characteristic apostolate of preaching the message of the Cross” (C. 73), and that he chooses the apostolates where he can really offer himself as a true apostle of the Cross (Re. 28h).

I think we can accept what is said for the Passionists in n. 4 of the Constitutions as the outline for everyone to whom the Word of the Cross is addressed:

- When “we accept the urgent demands made on each of us by the personal call of the Father to follow Jesus Christ Crucified... a continual vigilance to make the Gospel the supreme rule and criterion of our life”
- When a person has as the supreme rule and criterion of his life the message of the Cross and the revealed Gospel of Christ Crucified, he is truly a Christian who keeps perpetual remembrance of the Passion of Christ.

The Passionist, with “keen attention to the needs of others,” and striving “to lead them to the fulness of the Christian calling through the message of the Cross” (C. 4), has succeeded in demonstrating to himself and to others that his mission still has strength and validity for all time.

Thus, the herald of the Word of the Cross has become a true prophet by his evangelical witness (C. 63). “If the message of the Cross has not first penetrated our own lives, we ought not presume to proclaim it to others” (C. 9).

He has made the vow of more intensely remembering the Passion of the Lord and of promoting its remembrance...with “deeds.”(54) To remember the Passion of Christ with “deeds,” one’s very life, is to prove that this Passion is valid and has the power to overcome the challenges of the world in this age.

There is much to say on the nature, characteristics, and realization of the charism of proclamation of the Gospel of the Cross as seen from the prophetic. Not only is the charism enriched and illumined, but also one sees better what corresponds to the institutional part of the Congregation, so that it may become a reality in the Institute.

Have Passionists said the last word? Can they still discover “new things” for the apostolic future of the Congregation?

III.SOME OBSTACLES TO OVERCOME

A. OBSTACLES ARISING FROM SOCIETY

Passionists are also facing the challenges of the world as individuals who are born into and live in a determined society with its own cultural, economic, and other peculiarities. They carry on and actualize their activity in a particular, concrete society.

I am not judging this reality as if it were something negative. Passionists form part of the People of God and have the obligation of being immersed in the life and history of their contemporaries.(55)

I mention this element in order to recall that every Passionist, as part of his society, will find some difficulties in understanding, recognizing in depth, and in setting himself in opposition to the challenges which are to be eradicated from his own world. These challenges impede him in

offering, through the exercise of the prophetic charism, a new manner of living that would be a genuine and real response to the challenges, which are themselves true and real.

This is not a trite reflection. The endeavor to identify the Gospel of the Cross with the social, cultural, and economic categories is not only a danger, a risk.(56) It is a reality which demands profound discernment.

Requisite for everyone is a permanent conversion which will give the ability to express in words, with the testimony of life and of action, the true response to the challenges of our world. It is a responsibility which our own Congregation cannot evade.

I have been thinking that this is not for just any prophet. Only prophets who are truly courageous and decisive in everything can realize this transformation.

B. DIFFICULTIES ARISING WITHIN THE CONGREGATION FROM APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

Before getting down to particulars, it is good to recall the principles which regulate community life and the apostolate of the Congregation, or, as it is stated in the Constitutions, the “community dimension of our apostolate” (C. 67-69).

1. Principles on community life(57)

Passionist life is community life. It is so evident in the Constitutions that it would not be necessary to present some texts to prove it. The “gathered companions” of St. Paul of the Cross “who would live together” (C. 1), forms part of the content of the original inspiration which no one can question without touching the very essence of the Congregation itself. Life in community is “a most important witness for the whole Church” (C. 73).

Let us now see the principles:

1. “Called to the service of the Church(58) in the community and through the community.”
2. “Our apostolic commitments must therefore allow us to belong to a community, and to be involved in its external ministry” (C. 67).
3. “We should have special concern for those forms of the apostolate that are enriched by, and in turn nourish, community life” (C. 67).
4. “Our Congregation thus undertakes to help each religious to a free, conscious offering of himself to God and to the service of the Church in Passionist community life” (C. 77).
5. Still clearer, because more precise, is the statement: “In every community the various demands made by apostolic work will be harmonized with the requirements of community life” (Re. 29). While at first we were speaking of principles; apostolate - community life, here we get down to the reality of an organized life in which the communities may not assume apostolic activities which are an impediment to real community life.

2. Principles regarding the apostolate of the Congregation

I don't think it necessary to return to the topic of Passionist apostolate after all that I have been written. It interests us in the measure in which it is related to the response to the challenges of the world. For this it seems sufficient to propose the following principles, which should be interpreted in the light of the whole teaching of the Constitutions and the Regulations :

1. The choice of the apostolate is to be made on a community basis (Re. 28b).
2. Our apostolic activity is an expression of community life (C. 67).
3. "Our apostolic commitments must therefore allow us to belong to a community and to be involved in its external ministry" (C. 67).
4. Even if we are gifted with other charisms we must promote with all our strength the end and the apostolic initiatives of the Congregation.(59)
- 5." All the religious should be given suitable opportunities to make use of their various gifts in the many different apostolic works that the Congregation carries out for the welfare of the Church" (C. 68).
6. In the awareness that we share in the entire human community, we feel the need and the responsibility to cooperate with others of good will in the search for "all that is true, noble and just" (Ph 4:8), "bearing in mind the present needs of the Church and the world, our special mission in the Church, and the particular gifts of our religious" (C. 69).

3. Community life, specific mission and challenges

After highlighting the principles indicated above, we can prepare to reflect upon the relationship between community life, specific mission and challenges of the world. These principles have the incomparable value of indicating precisely the distinguishing marks of life and activity in the Congregation of the Passion. But there are, in their turn, some clear limitations to the possible responses which Passionists can offer to the challenges of the world.

The universal principles proposed elsewhere opening the horizon to assume the challenges of the world are somewhat curtailed; rather, some could not be put into practice because they do not fit into the outlines traced by these principles.

Keeping in mind the actual organization of community life with its daily schedule, such as, the horarium and the acts to be done in common, it is readily understood that many challenges, which actually renew in a pitiless and crushing manner the Passion of Christ in his members, cannot be accepted seriously by Passionists. At most they can speak and teach the others to fight and destroy them.(60)

Many other challenges, which also manifest the weakness and limitations of man and evils to be uprooted, cannot be the object of the Passionists' commitment because their activity, preaching, is not directed specifically to these challenges.

Because of this twofold congregational situation, before every response the relationships between Passionists and the challenges of the world acquire a unique characteristic, and lead to

inevitable consequences. For us the most worthy point of consideration at the moment is the necessity of selecting the challenges Passionists have been called to assume, keeping in mind their identity, their mission, and the special thrust of their apostolic activity.

According to the Constitutions and Regulations, there is no doubt that at least three principles have an unquestionable primacy, and that all three must be always present: community life, priority of the ministry of the Word, and proclamation of the Gospel of the Cross.

If we follow the guidance of these three principles, some challenges may never be the direct object of the Congregation's apostolate, and Passionists will only indirectly accept others.

On the other hand, it seems that we cannot prescind from considering the three historical moments of the Congregation: what has been done until now; what is being done at present; and what could be done.

For my part, I ask that there be kept in mind not only the tradition and what is to be found in the Constitutions, but also the prophetic vocation which each Passionist should exercise in the response he must give to the present challenges of the world, at least to those which more directly cause the crucifixion of Christ even now.

IV. SOME CONCLUSIONS

It is evident that it is very difficult to arrive at some clear and logical conclusions. Many are the criteria and orientations; it seems impossible to keep account of them all and to apply them according to the degree of importance. From the simple fact of giving priority to one or the other, the conclusions will necessarily differ.

At the close of this exposition I offer my personal conclusions as a service I trust will be useful.

A. RELATIONSHIPS: CHRISTIAN RELIGION - THE WORLD

The subject of the challenges of the world is a recurrent regarding the Church as well as the Congregation, even though this terminology is not used. Basically it is a question of the relationships between the Christian religion and the world. The novelty of the present time is in the fact that both the Church and the Congregation are seeing the importance of the world and taking interest in it. The relationship has passed from a condemnation and rejection of the world to a dialogue which is considered as necessary.

Concerning our Congregation, the present position in regard to the world is a Copernican revolution which, in a certain sense, has upset the theological-spiritual-ascetical-pastoral scheme in which the Congregation was conceived, founded and actualized up to the contemporary era. The presence and influence of the world in the life of the Institute has not been ruminated and assimilated in a positive manner up to the present.

B. PRESENCE OF THE CHALLENGES IN THE HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION

It seems only just to mention that our understanding today of the phrase, "responses to the challenges of the world," and moved by love for Christ Crucified and for our neighbors who are

suffering the challenges of the world, were present in the thought of St. Paul of the Cross and of our religious, when they spoke of charity toward God and toward the neighbor.

I have no intention of weakening the force of the questioning arising from our present challenges, and neither of stopping the struggle to eradicate them. I want only to recall that the present thought and involvement can be enriched by combining it with that which Passionists who have preceded us have taught and practiced.

C. HARMONIZING THE TRADITIONAL AND THE NEW

It cannot be denied that there is a certain conflict between tradition, the conservation of the congregational patrimony, and the new elements introduced into the Constitutions of 1984.

Everyone would be pleased if a symbiosis had been achieved, a perfect harmonization between inherited patrimony and added newness.

The Passionist will understand the value of the challenges according to his appreciation of these two elements: Patrimony-novelty. It seems to me that this theme merits more profound study.

D. IMPORTANCE OF THE THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The editors of the Constitutions – members of the General Chapters, of Commissions, etc. – have introduced into the text various theologies, or better, there is a theology derived from various theological systems.

I do not intend to judge the editors, nor to defend a particular system, one specific way of using theology, nor to condemn it. I only want to call attention to the possibility of the interpretation of a specific text according to the theological method which is used.

Thus, in respect to the challenges of the world, different attitudes can be taken: from an exaltation to a condemnation, perhaps prompted only by the theological method used.

E. THE PLACE OF THE CHALLENGES IN THE CONSTITUTIONS

The inclusion of the so-called challenges of the world in the Constitutions is really interesting for various reasons. Let us see some of them:

1. These challenges are “located,” “placed,” in certain numbers so that the list will be complete or because the topic is important, better still, actual.
2. I have the impression that the editors have not succeeded in combining, harmonizing, all that is stated about the challenges in the Constitutions in a unified and logical manner.
3. The teaching in the Constitutions regarding the challenges of the world has not been placed in relation to the rest of the text. Rather, it seems that they are in opposition. Let me explain: There is the statement of the principles regarding the challenges to be eradicated and the manner of doing this, but then other principles are promulgated which, in reality, annul the principles proposed as responses to the challenges.

F. THE CHALLENGES IN LIGHT OF THE PURPOSE OF THE CONGREGATION

Another element of difference between the present Constitutions and the previous ones is the pastoral content.

In the previous ones the ultimate aim is the religious in relation to his sanctity, his perfection, becoming a truly holy Passionist, while in the Constitutions of 1984, without letting this element lose its importance and strength, and letting it still remain primary, it is evident that the pastoral style fills almost the whole of the chapters. I speak of a certain intensity.

As applied to the challenges, it is easily understood that the religious form opinions of different value according to their inclination toward the first or second understanding.

G. AUTHENTIC CREDIBILITY OF THE RESPONSES

Anyone could gather that the relationship of Passionists with the challenges of the world must not be taken solely from the angle of the mission and apostolic activity.

The idea of personal and community witness has frequently appeared. Passionists must in themselves be victorious over the challenges. Any activity, even the proclamation of the Gospel of the Cross, would not be credible if we have not succeeded first in overcoming in ourselves, our communities, province and Congregation, that against which we are fighting

H. THE RESPONSE OF THE PROPHET

In conclusion, a word on the prophetic power which is included in this teaching of the Constitutions.

We all know the definition of prophet: one who speaks in the name of another, enlightening, presenting a project for the future.

The Passionist is the one who speaks in the name of Christ Crucified and presents to the world the project which Christ taught and practiced on the Cross. It is a response to the challenges of the world.

We Passionists, by committing ourselves to the full realization of our vocation and mission, become prophets, speaking in the name of Christ Crucified, presenting his message of the Cross to our listeners: people, the world. They challenge us to prove that Christ Crucified can, has the power to destroy evils and the causes which provoke the challenges. It is up to us with our life, our works, our words...and...

NOTES

1. Further study can be made by consulting the “COMMENTARIES ON THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS” in the series Studies in Passionist History and Spirituality, nn. 16-18, (Passionist Generalate, Rome, 1987).
2. Everyone recognizes that there are other challenges not coming from the world, for example, within the Church itself: Passionists and the challenges of the universal Church, of the local Church, of Christian groups, and, above all, of apostolic groups. It’s an important theme requiring reflection, orientation and guidelines. We are not concerned with such challenges at the moment.
3. Hence, I am not concerned about defining “world.” Sufficient to note that in the Constitutions and Regulations there is generally a twofold meaning: The world of sin-evil, and the world-society in all its richness and complexity.
4. I also intend to refer to the 1984 Regulations.
5. There’s another reason. I don’t sufficiently know the position of the Italian Passionists (The Assembly of CIPI) and their responses to the Preparatory Commission for the General Chapter (January 26, 1988).
6. Without doubt they are also read in light of the Gospel
7. Mutuae Relationes, nn. 11-12.
8. See LG, 12, 42, 43; PC, 1, on the charismatic origins of the consecrated life.
9. Perhaps you have noted the increase of courses, conferences, etc., on the theme of the prophetic element of the consecrated life after the promulgation of the Constitutions.
10. Implicitly, many times. The terms “prophet,” “prophesying,” are not found in the index of the Constitutions and Regulations.
11. As also without “congregational patrimony” and without structures.
12. See “Report of the Preparatory Commission,” July, 1987. Our reflection doesn’t have participation on the General Chapter as a direct goal. Many members of CIPI will not be present at the General Chapter. However, it would be useful for one who will.
13. A complete treatment of “The Passionists and the Challenges of the World” should expand these four points: 1. In the teachings of St. Paul of the Cross; 2. In the Rules and Constitutions; 3. In the life of the Congregation; 4. In the apostolic programs of the missionaries.
14. R.1775, II; III. Included in the edition of the Rule and Constitutions of 1984.
15. R.1775, III. The text refers to the solitude of the retreat.
16. A clear reference to the memory of the death of Christ on the Cross celebrated every day in the Eucharistic sacrifice.
17. Social benefits resulting from preaching were a consequence not a direct goal of Passionist preaching.
18. C. 38. CRIS, Contemplative Dimension of the Religious Life, (Roma, 1980), A:5.
19. C. 1; L, II, 499.
20. C. 60; LG 11.
21. C. 70; RetC 94-95; Paul VI, Letter to Fr. General, October 12, 1976. ACTA CP, XVII (1977), 195.

22. C. 72; Proc. I, 572.
23. C. 38. CRIS, op. cit., A:5
24. C. 57; ET, 17-18.
25. This challenge and the following one refer directly to the internal life of the Congregation. They are important because they are a part of the witness the Passionist presents in his apostolic mission.
26. C. 18; Mt 20:28.
27. C. 26; cfr. Ephes. 2:14-16.
28. C. 25; Jn 13:45.
29. C. 28; cfr. Mt 23, 8.
30. Cfr. Phil 2:2-4.
31. C. 120; PC 14.
32. C. 16; cfr. Mt 19:12.
33. C. 17; cfr. 1 Cor 15:28; Jn 17:21.
34. C. 29; Cfr. Mt 25:36.
35. C. 30; cfr. Lv 19:32.
36. C. 38; CRIS, op. cit., A:5.
37. C. 13; cfr. 2 Cor 9:7-9.
38. C. 1; L, II, 499.
39. Fundamental teaching of St. Paul of the Cross in explaining “Memoria Passionis.”
40. Cfr. Jn 17:9-19.
41. Cfr. Mt 10:45.
42. C. 33; The number refers to community life and the local Church.
43. C. 33; GS, 1.
44. Cfr. 1 Jn 1:1.
45. C. 21. The Gospel invites us to see the human condition in a new light, namely, in the obedience to the Father’s will (cfr. Mt 7:21; 6:10), and in fraternal charity (cfr. Jn 13:34; 15:12 and 17). C. 22.
46. C. 50. L, II, 224, 269; III, 827.
47. C. 62. Papal Bull “Supremi Apostolatus,” i,3,5.
48. C. 50. RetC pp. 4, 88-87; L, IV, 140; II, 272-274; V, 57059. Notizia 1747, n. 1-2; 1768, n. 1-2.
49. C. 1; Re. 7a. Cfr. L, IV, 217-220; and Preface to the first Rule, 1720.
50. C 2. Cfr. Notizia 1747, n. 3; L, III, 417-420.
51. 1 Cor 1:23; Mt 28:6.
52. C. 1-6. The teaching on the “Memoria Passionis” could be developed here.
53. C. 6; Re 28; Re. 28a.
54. C. 96; C 6; L, IV, 220-221; Rule of 1720; RetC pp. 56-57ss, 86-87.
55. Cfr. section I, B and II, A in this paper.
56. If we accept the division of humanity into four “worlds,” what I say is valid for all four.
57. I treat community life in relation to the Congregations apostolate. It is very synthetic and could be greatly expanded and enriched.
58. Without a doubt, being part of the local Church, we share its pastoral needs. We offer our ministry, but “without harm to our community life and our specific apostolate.”
59. C. 68; cfr. 1 Cor 12:4-11.
60. There is no denying that some challenges influence community life and, at times, even intend to suppress it. These challenges inevitably cause various problems in community life, for

example, the rapid socio-cultural changes. The Regulations oblige a review of certain forms of community life (Re. 10). This subject needs to be studied more in depth.